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From the Office of the Director of Health

Protect Children with Safe Easter Traditions

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department encourages parents to use caution this Easter weekend with some traditions that put children at risk for disease. Young chicks and ducklings that are often given as gifts can carry harmful bacteria called *Salmonella*. A child who pets, holds, hugs or kisses the birds may be exposed to the bacteria and may become seriously ill.

Children are most at risk for infection from *Salmonella* because their immune systems are still developing and they are more likely than adults to put their fingers in their mouths. Other people who are at increased risk are people with HIV/AIDS, pregnant women, senior adults and people with suppressed immune systems.

To protect children this Easter:

- Give stuffed toys as gifts instead of live animals.
- Do not let children under 5 handle baby chicks or other young birds, or the packaging or pen they have been in.
- Make sure children who touch chicks or ducklings wash their hands immediately afterwards with soap and water.
- If toys, blankets, pacifiers or other objects come in contact with the birds or their habitat, wash the items with warm, soapy water before returning them to children.
- Do not eat or drink while interacting with the birds.
- Keep birds away from areas where food or drink are prepared or served.

The infection caused by *Salmonella* usually leads to diarrhea, fever and stomach pain about 1 to 3 days after the bacteria is ingested. Other symptoms might include nausea, chills, headache or general body aches. Children and adults who are at higher risk may develop more severe infections and may need to be hospitalized.

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